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ABSTRACT

Early school leaving is an issue internationally. In Australia, nearly one in three young people is at risk of not completing secondary education, a situation that affects long-term employment prospects and earning capacity. Not all leave early for the same reason, and their reasons are not necessarily negative ones. Six "types" of early leavers are: positive, opportune, would-be, circumstantial, discouraged, and alienated leavers. Some groups are particularly at risk. Risk factors include the following: psycho-social, behavioral, and physical factors; factors associated with the family and with the school; socio-economic and group factors; and the lack of literacy, numeracy, and study skills. Early school leavers are at increasing levels of disadvantage in employment and further training. Since 1994, a range of policy initiatives have been undertaken that have a role to play in using vocational education and training (VET) to assist the access to job and training pathways of young people "at risk" in the labor market. VET has not helped early leavers as expected, although growth in course enrollments in older age groups has occurred. Technical and further education has not picked up many early leavers because entry standards have risen. A major problem for early leavers is fragmented services at the local level. Possible solutions include preventive, integrated, community, and partnership approaches. (A workable model based on a more coordinated approach is provided, with implications for policy, research, and practice. The report contains 29 references.) (YLB)

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Early School Leavers and VET
Research at a Glance

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RESEARCH AT A GLANCE

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Research at a glance

Early school leavers and VET

Introduction to early school leavers and VET

Summary of key issues emerging from the research

- [illegible] impact on their long-term employment prospects [illegible]
- [illegible] Not all young people leave early for the same reason [illegible]
- [illegible] some groups are particularly at risk [illegible]
- [illegible] fragmented services at the local level [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible] work together to assist young people [illegible]
- In the context of [illegible] vocational learning and VET [illegible]
- Both overseas and in Australia there are already working models of more integrated approaches to [illegible] school leavers. The results [illegible]

Table 1: Unemployment incidence up to the age of 24, for people born in 1970, by education characteristics

	Unemployment incidence (%)
Whole cohort	7.7
Did not complete Year 12	11.8
Completed Year 12	5.7
Post-school qualification	
• TAFE certificate	10.0
• Apprenticeship	7.0
• TAFE diploma	5.6
• Higher education diploma	4.6
• University degree	8.6

(Source: Marks, G & Fleming, N 1998. *Factors influencing youth unemployment in Australia 1980–1994, LSAY research report no. 7*, ACER, Melbourne)

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Background and context

Young people leaving school, early or otherwise, face problems of decreasing job availability and access, lack of work experience, increasing casualisation of the labour market, and conflicting pressures to complete their schooling and/or to take on volunteer, unpaid or part-time work. If they do not complete Year 12, their problems are compounded. Wider contextual issues affecting them include increasing economic and social instability, social expectations, a growing incidence of homelessness and poverty, and problems of self-identity, particularly for those alienated by their school experience (see for example Batten & Russell 1995; Dwyer 1996; ACSA 1996).

We live in complex times, with rapid change and high unemployment, both of which particularly affect young people. The education, training and business sectors need to co-operate in developing new ways of identifying and catering for the varied needs of young people as individuals. Initiatives are being taken to develop more flexible approaches and greater diversity in pathways, breaking down the historical demarcation between work, training and education.

A clear national policy emphasis for vocational education has been established in 1999 through the 'Adelaide declaration on national goals for schooling in the 21st century'. Vocational education and training are now being integrated with Year 11/12 and TAFE certificate courses, while in the compulsory years of schooling a range of 'vocational learning' subject options is to be offered to younger students, for example through enhanced work experience, placement and enterprise programs. This affects all students, but flexible approaches may be of particular use to early school leavers.

Who are the early school leavers? Why and when do they leave?

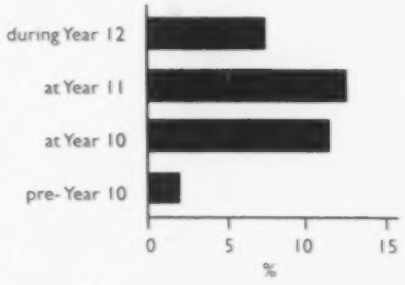
Early school leavers are often equated with, or confused with 'students at risk'. The Youth Research Centre (Dwyer 1996) suggests that in fact there are at least six 'types' of early leaver, each with very different reasons and needs:

- **positive leavers**, who choose to take up employment, apprenticeship or alternative career paths
- **opportune leavers**, who haven't decided on a career path, but leave to take up a job or perhaps a relationship in preference to school. Later, they may need advice or a 'second chance' at training
- **would-be leavers**, or 'reluctant stayers', who prefer to leave but lack opportunities beyond school. The opportunity for better teacher–student relationships and negotiated curriculum could improve their situation
- **circumstantial leavers**, who leave school for non-educational reasons, for example family need. Innovative approaches, with flexible attendance and part-time work, might improve their retention
- **discouraged leavers**, who have not had success in their schooling, and who have low levels of performance and interest. More flexible school policies and curriculum might help these students, catering for their diverse learning and pastoral needs
- **alienated leavers**, whose needs may be similar to the discouraged students, but which are more difficult to meet. Dwyer suggests that alternative local and community post-school programs beyond the school might re-engage these students

McIntyre et al. (1999) used versions of these groupings in their research. They classified 28 per cent of students surveyed as 'positive leavers with a vocational focus' (that is, towards a particular line of work); 20 per cent as 'positive leavers with an occupational focus' (that is, towards winning jobs, rather than a specific career path); 25 per cent as 'opportune or circumstantial leavers'; and 28 per cent as 'discouraged or alienated leavers'. With overlaps, about 38 per cent were termed 'at risk' in transition from school to work.

Most early school leavers quit at or after Year 10 and before Year 12 (Dwyer 1996, based on Victorian data. See figure 1, right). Patterns vary according to age, gender and when the students are surveyed. Recent research concentrating on students who leave before the start of Year 11 (Marks & Fleming 1999) suggests around 70 per cent appeared to be leaving to go into, or seek, employment (but only about 58 per cent of the girls). This differs from Holden and Dwyer's 1992 research where 'most of the young people's reasons had to do with wanting to get away from school'.

Figure 1: An indication of cumulative early leaving



Note: About one quarter of these early school leavers go on to apprenticeships or to TAFE.

Source: Dwyer, P 1996. *Opting out: Early school leavers and the degeneration of youth policy*, Youth Research Centre, Melbourne, chart 11, p.20, using data from 1991 for Years 10 and 11, and an average for 1992–95 of those leaving during Year 12.

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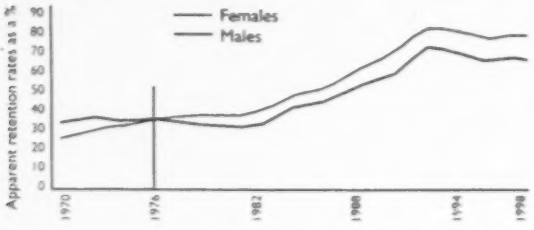
Who is at risk and what are the risk factors?

The Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA) called their 1999 research report no.1 *Leaving school early without credentials: As many reasons as students*. The point is valid. However, some groups are particularly 'at risk', both of leaving school early and in transition to work and adulthood. According to Dwyer they include children from low-income families, Aboriginal students, country region students, truants, and homeless young people. In addition, as indicated in figure 2 below, there is an ongoing difference in apparent retention rates between male and female students.

Figure 2: Apparent retention rates to Year 12: all Australian schools 1970–1998



(Source: ABS, various years, *Schools Australia*, Cat. no. 4221.0, AGPS, Canberra)

Researchers have also identified risk factors associated with early school leaving, including:

- psycho-social, behavioural and physical factors
- factors associated with the family—structure, functioning, separation, socio-economic context
- factors associated with the school—organisation, curriculum, climate
- socio-economic and group factors
- lack of literacy, numeracy and study skills

When interviewed during other research projects about their reasons for leaving school early, students emphasised particularly the individual student relationship with the teacher and/or the school culture, seeing the school as non-stimulating, and facing a lack of choice or inability to take subjects due to course or timetable structures. Other reasons include having poor results or not feeling smart enough to pass subjects at higher than Year 10 level; perceiving a lack of support, alternatives, relevance, and opportunity to be referred on for help and advice; and seeing school rules and regulations in a negative way.

Marks, in discussing his 1999 research, argues that low achievement at school is of overriding importance. If a student is doing well at school, he or she will stay on, regardless of the school and generally any other factor. Conversely, if students don't feel good about themselves at school, they will tend not to want to stay there.

It is important to concentrate on early school *leaving* as the issue to be addressed, rather than concentrating on a notional 'problem group' of early *leavers*, and to be clear about what 'at risk' means. As commented earlier, students have different reasons for leaving school early. Not all early school leavers are automatically 'at risk' of marginalisation in transition to work, further education and training, or both. Schools can help them negotiate the risks they face so that they leave school well informed and with a range of skills. However, we need to bear in mind McIntyre et al's (1999) research, which showed that it is alienated leavers who are most at risk yet least likely to find the school helpful'.

What are the likely outcomes of leaving school early or staying on?

Early school leavers face intense competition in the labour market. The rising demand for skilled labour makes it hard for them to find stable employment, and often may prevent their smooth integration into adult society. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 1996) has noted that policies to tackle this have tended to focus on problems in the transition stage, with mixed results.

Early school leavers face increasing levels of disadvantage in terms of employment and further training, particularly as traineeships and TAFE places are increasingly being taken by those with higher qualifications, resulting in a lack of pathways for early school leavers. Their employment prospects are limited and tend to be inflexible over time. Part-time work often does not translate into full-time employment. There are limited promotion prospects. Students who left school with limited study skills also face difficulties in terms of lifelong learning, or returning to formal study in later years.

In their 1998 study, Marks and Fleming (see table 1, page 1) showed that completion of Year 12 has a substantial effect on the incidence of unemployment. This appears to persist over time. They also found that 'the effect of Year 12 completion on decreasing the likelihood of unemployment is independent of school achievement. This finding suggests that encouraging low achievers to complete secondary school will improve their employment prospects' (Marks & Fleming 1998, cited in Dusseldorp 1999a). This needs to be balanced against the need to consider 'positive' leavers and 'negative' leavers in different ways.

In addition, in 1992, a Senate Standing Committee (Dwyer 1996) commented that there are some for whom continued schooling is 'at best unhelpful' and '... staying at school for some in this group can be counterproductive if it changes neutral feelings about learning into negative ones, and leaves the young person with the wish never to re-enter the training system at a future time'. As the OECD (1996) has pointed out, prevention is better than cure, and 'the pathways to work and adult life would be improved by aiming government policy first and foremost at reducing failure levels at school', while recognising that the success of education will not be enough of itself, without links to a range of alternative approaches and services—in the socio-economic, welfare, health, employment, community and other areas.

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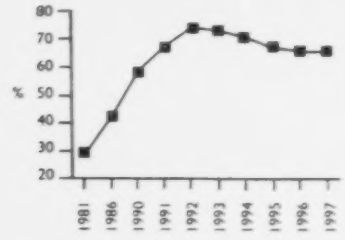
So, what about retention?

There is a policy assumption at the educational system level that students should be encouraged to stay on at school beyond the compulsory years. Retention rates are seen as indicators of school performance—and certainly there are solid arguments for completing Year 12, given the long-term employment implications for early leavers. However, it is also certain that increasing numbers of students, disaffected for one reason or another, choose to leave early.

Figure 3: Apparent retention rates to Year 12, government schools, 1981–1997



(Source: Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF) 1998. *Australia's youth: Reality and risk*. DSF: Sydney)

Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicate that Australia's retention rates of government secondary students to Year 12 have fallen from a 1992 high (see figure 3, left). This has caused concern. There is also concern over the loss of students in Year 11 (where South Australian research [SSABSA 1999] suggests that some students are finding courses more difficult than they had anticipated) and in areas where students experience socio-economic disadvantage.

It is not enough, however, to see retention at school as inherently 'good', without considering what it offers the individual student, the direction taken by the individual leaver, and the reasons for leaving.

Retention rates don't tell the whole story. They don't take into account the relative value of options as perceived by the student, where students go as alternatives or whether early leavers subsequently return to study. In research utilising focus groups, the parents of some early school leaving students asked the question 'Retention for what?' (Golding & Willis, unpublished). These parents valued the completion of post-compulsory education in principle, but were concerned that it should relate more closely to what they perceived as their children's needs and short- or long-term futures.

Retention *per se* should not be seen as the assumed norm for all young people. More realistic, attainable and diverse pathways are needed (rather than set packages or programs), attuned to the concept of lifelong learning, respect for other non-educational life experiences, and the meeting of individual student needs. As these may require flexible access via varied combinations of sectors and settings, simple 'retention' will no longer be an appropriate measure.

What can vocational education offer?

Reviewing key historical developments in vocational education and training areas, the Curriculum Corporation (1996) identified six significant initiatives: work experience programs; vocational placements; funding of specific vocational initiatives; TAFE/school co-operative developments; the integration of employment-related competencies into school curricula; and formal career education.

Since 1994 a range of policy initiatives have been undertaken; for example, changes in youth allowances; New Apprenticeships; employer incentives; group training companies and VET in schools, among others. All of these have had some role to play in using VET as an instrument to assist the access to job and training pathways of young people 'at risk' in the labour market. In the school setting there's been a mixture of old and new strategies—usually based around careers/work education, sometimes involving work experience and placements beyond the school—but the success of such programs has been limited. They have remained low in status, commonly with restricted time allocation. Students have tended to have little choice of where they are placed or what they do (Ryan 1997; Misko 1998).

In the context of international research, the OECD (1996) suggests that vocationally oriented programs neither improve job prospects nor the likelihood of school retention unless they: are strongly supported by employers; closely align curriculum, assessment and certification with the occupationally based structure of the labour market; integrate general and vocational programs; and enable young people to move easily between different types of program. The OECD contrasts the limitations of most programs, as they are currently configured, with the benefits of programs and specialised courses tailored to student needs, particularly when those students are 'at risk'.

Such benefits come at a cost. In Australia, Ryan (1997) commented that 'effective vocational education is extremely resource intensive and requires fundamental changes to schools' cultures and organisation', and argued that vocational education has tended to be marginalised as an 'alternative curriculum while providing few benefits to the severely disadvantaged'. Certainly the provision of VET courses in schools has considerable resource implications, not only if the school wishes to provide courses independently, but also if the intention is to buy in services from other providers. If limited resources are spread to meet the new demands, rather than separate resources being available to fund the new initiatives, then there are flow-on implications for other courses and other groups of students in the school.

Changing cultures to meet individual needs more effectively requires specialist support. As long ago as 1994, the Schools Council (cited in Golding & Willis, unpublished) advocated the appointment of trained co-ordinators to liaise with business and industry, for training and support, for developing infrastructures and materials, for monitoring developments, for motivation and for curriculum and teaching advice. Five years later, more development and co-ordination of flexible

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approaches are still needed. A broader view of learning is required. Schools and other providers of education and training need increasingly to cater for individual students who might be based in the school for part of their time, and be linked flexibly into the work and training sectors for the remainder of their time.

What has been happening up to now? VET has not helped early school leavers as much as might have been expected. Course enrolments in VET grew by almost 17 per cent between 1995 and 1996. However, the growth in the VET sector has not occurred in the 15–19-year-old age cohort, but in older age groups. In the period following post-compulsory schooling, where TAFE might have been expected to pick up many of the early school leavers, this has often not been the case. As participation rates in TAFE have risen, so have entry standards. Year 12 and adult re-entry students now often take places that once would have provided pathways for early school leavers (Lamb et al 1998). Resourcing patterns have reinforced this trend. Ironically, early leavers (particularly boys) have achieved a higher completion rate than such students, once actually enrolled.

The challenge in the post-school setting is to counter the decline in possible pathways, to break down barriers to 'access' and 'success', to match policies and resourcing in practice, and to overcome the relative disadvantage being experienced by early leavers. As with schools, this means that we can't continue with a 'one size fits all' approach to learning; instead we must concentrate on flexibility, choices, co-ordination and planning as the keys to successful learning, whether achieved through teaching, training or work-based experiences—or through combinations of all three—to meet the needs of individual young people.

New policy initiatives in VET and vocational learning

The vocational education area is being reframed. At the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) meeting in April 1999, a clear distinction was drawn between 'vocational learning' in Years 9 and 10 and 'vocational education and training' courses at Years 11 and 12. 'Vocational education' as a whole was seen as a central part of schooling. Defining VET, the MCEETYA minutes (1999) state that …

> *Throughout Australia, VET in Schools Programs are recognised as industry-specific entry level training programs which deliver competencies endorsed within the National Training Framework and provide credit towards a credential within the Australian Qualifications Framework. (They) are also accredited within senior secondary certificates and have industry recognition.*

At the *Quality VET in Schools* conference, held in Melbourne in May 1999, speakers emphasised the need to affirm the rigour of VET courses and raise their status. Terry Moran, Queensland Director General of Education, agreed and commented on how the school and TAFE sectors could work together in developing flexible programs. In July, Dr Ken Boston, NSW Director General of Education, and head of TAFE NSW, responded to a recent refusal by NSW universities to recognise more than two units of new VET courses towards university entrance. The Australian reported him as saying that 'society can no longer view vocational education as a second-best option for school students'.

Moves to raise VET courses to full certificate status will attract many Year 11 and 12 students to undertake work-related education, including some who are currently potential early school leavers. However, without compromising the rigour and status desired for VET, care is needed to ensure that the new courses are flexible enough to include rather than exclude students who are 'at risk' of leaving school early, and/or will be 'at risk' in their transition to the labour market. VET courses will need to be flexible in access, delivery, relevance to the individual student, and have appropriately flexible indicators of success. Otherwise those who are 'at risk' of early leaving may see such courses as beyond their reach, and not attempt them, unless they have gained adequate skills and confidence through vocational learning experiences earlier in their schooling.

Vocational learning, as distinct from 'VET', was defined at the April MCEETYA meeting as 'a generic concept, a component of general education' … applying at all levels of schooling, but particularly as a broad provision for students at Years 9 and 10. In addition, vocational learning was seen by the ministers as offering particular opportunities for potential early school leavers to gain experience in work-related areas and to articulate into recognised VET courses.

Services available for early school leavers

It is difficult to generalise about services for early school leavers. It's not that nothing is being done for them. A lot is going on, but it is fragmented, disparate and often provider or area specific. VET is just one part of a broad range of services, albeit a very significant one. A wide range of services is offered by a variety of government, community and private agencies. The nature and types of program vary greatly between regions and States, and they change constantly over time.

There is no co-ordination of the various services and it is often difficult to map them. A detailed example highlights some of the issues. Research on the Central Coast of NSW produced a two-page table of programs and providers in a single geographical area (McIntyre et al 1999). The providers fell into two main groups: government and private/community. In the government group schools provided careers/work education which varied from school to school, and TAFE institutes offered 'get skilled' courses, certificate courses for Year 9 and 10 equivalence, apprenticeship training, and traineeships.

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Indicating the scale and diversity to be found in this geographical area, however, typical private and community provider services included: a pathways program to support early school leavers who are at risk; job preparation, activities and career advice; group training which encompassed employing apprentices and trainees and leasing them to host employers; fee-for-service training; job search services, work experience and work trial activities for people with disabilities; a federally-funded agency finding employment and training opportunities for homeless and 'at risk' young people which involved acting as a referral point and providing counselling; and a help early leavers program, with a non-accredited certificate of completion for 14–24-year-olds which might encourage participants to return to school. A company auspiced by the Department of Community Services offered advocacy services—running youth workshops, camps and excursions, personal development programs, guest speakers, and parent, carer and peer support for 12–25-year-olds, and provided 'drop-in' and youth centres. The diversity illustrated by this example is not unique. Any area of Australia could compile a similar, and equally diverse, list.

The varied providers shared a number of perceptions about the early leavers they dealt with. They highlighted their low self-esteem, their literacy and numeracy problems, learning difficulties and lack of general social skills. They also noted their dysfunctional families and associated problems; their poor or non-existent role models, together with a poor work ethic and distrust of a system they saw as having failed them. They saw the young people as in need of further education and training. When interviewed, all the providers were clear about the training opportunities they themselves could provide to early school leavers. However, the sectors and agencies worked independently—McIntyre et al (1999) found that 'when asked what they knew about what else was available their knowledge was sketchy', especially in other sectors. In addition, local TAFE responses suggested that they didn't see themselves as having 'a direct brief to cater for early school leavers. They feel they [the school leavers] still need guided control at a location other than TAFE where they can make the transition to adulthood'.

Finding solutions: examples of preventive, integrated, community and partnership approaches

Possible solutions to these issues include a combination of preventive measures to take account of the future and strategies for dealing with the current situation. In the long term, there are obvious areas to target with preventive measures, in order to minimise the likelihood of students not completing their secondary schooling. One such area is in literacy and numeracy, which remains fundamental to students' capacity for study and work, whether at school or beyond. Traditionally, the teaching of these life skills has been seen as the job of primary schools. While the early years of schooling are still vital to students' success, increasing efforts are needed, at all levels of education and training, to ensure improved literacy and numeracy for all students, and particularly for students in groups which are known to be disproportionately represented among early school leavers, as noted earlier in this paper. The current national priority for this area reflects its importance.

Research in the middle years of schooling (including ACSA 1996) has identified the problem of alienation among many students, and its effect upon their levels of achievement, as well as the implications for early school leaving. Initiatives such as the Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD) project, currently under way, are exploring ways in which student engagement can be improved. Schools are experimenting with a variety of approaches, including more flexible curriculum, improved teaching practice related to student learning styles, and more student-centred programs.

In dealing with students who are already at risk of leaving school early, or who are at risk in terms of their transition to the work market, there are innovative working models in Australia and overseas. There is no single best solution. A number are exploring new approaches to transition pathways, while some provide services and courses in different settings, with flexible access, scale of operation and combinations, including the capacity for part-time work / part-time study, or later return to study, to meet the individual needs of students. Another group is finding ways to map and co-ordinate the diverse approaches of varied providers.

In Sweden, for example, there is community-wide co-ordination of services and a collective sense of responsibility towards the future of young people. Local authorities are obliged to take responsibility for all young people up to the age of 18, including those who have left school. A personal plan is drawn up for each young person not in full-time education or full-time work. Each plan must contain elements of counselling, education and work and is reviewed with the young person every ten weeks. During that time, possibilities of transition into regular education or permanent work must be examined. Each young person is tracked and monitored to avoid any 'falling through cracks'.

Similar community-based approaches are being explored in Norway, and in Ireland where local centres are staffed by trained guidance staff who both advise local early school leavers and deliver train-the-trainer sessions in the area. The OECD reports that the Nordic approach keeps the number of early school leavers down (Durand-Drouhin et al 1998). It can put a strain on municipal resources, but leads to rapid identification of those who have failed to make a successful transition, and subsequently to effective action plans for each individual. This approach involves mutual responsibility and the active engagement of government, community, employers and trade unions in policy-making, program design and certification where appropriate.

In Australia, pilot partnerships have explored the co-ordination of efforts between the education and training sectors, the community, and business and industry, and focus on meeting individual student needs.

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Examples include:

- [illegible]-industry partnership Employment Development Group (MOSEDG), the Geelong Regional Vocational Education Consortium, and projects at Kwinana and Gladstone, linked schools, local industry and TAFE
- [illegible] through School Industry Partnerships (RDSIP) project, where schools in South Australia and Victoria worked in regional clusters with the community, business and industry, using the key competencies for assessment and reporting (Redman & McLeish 1999), and including enhanced work placement programs as well as local mentor and counselling programs with non-profit, service and business organisations
- [illegible] Youth Commitment pilot program, supported by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum and the Victorian Education Department, which aims to help all young people complete Year 12 or the equivalent. It involves almost 30 partner organisations, including local government, schools and education providers, employers, job network brokers, family service agencies, and an Area Consultative Committee

Such programs share a goal of reducing the pool of young people who are at risk—either of leaving school early or in terms of labour market and further education participation. Working independently, they have developed integrated preventive and intervention approaches, based largely on a vocational learning paradigm and co-ordinated cross-sectoral participation. They are discovering workable solutions to the problem of early school leaving by combining their skills, expertise and resources to achieve better outcomes for young people. Dusseldorp (1999c) argues that this is the way to go—with a Youth Commitment national initiative, delivered to individuals, through partnerships, at a local level.

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Future directions: summary of implications for policy, research and practice

A workable model based on a more co-ordinated approach has implications for policy, research and practice.

POLICY at national and State levels would emphasise:

- early intervention for literacy and numeracy, as a preventive measure
- early identification, monitoring and support for students 'at risk' of early leaving, or of problems in transition
- enhancing the teaching, assessment and reporting of generic skills and competencies at middle school level
- leadership, goal-setting, resourcing, trialling and endorsement of integrated, flexible approaches, co-ordinated between the education, training, community and business sectors
- clear guidelines for dealing with those who would leave school early to avoid a single Year 11/12 qualification incorporating VET—with options for flexible enrolment, curriculum and assessment, plus exit certificates to include details of their generic skills and broader learning/work experience, as well as academic achievement
- resourcing tagged specifically to ensure improved provision, access and outcomes for early school leavers

RESEARCH would include:

- linking research more explicitly to policy-making and practice, including exploration of the funding and cost benefits of the above approaches in a broader social context
- monitoring and building on current research and 'best practice', in Australia and overseas, to inform decision-making
- exploring the links between student achievement and VET studies
- surveying business and industry on their needs and reactions, especially regarding partnerships, increased opportunities for apprenticeships/part-time work and study, and the avoidance of wastage

In the area of PRACTICE some suggestions include:

- the development of more holistic approaches, together with pathways to meet individual learning needs
- facilitation of early leavers returning to school, TAFE or other study, particularly to enhance their employable skills
- development of partnerships between schools, TAFE/higher education, business, community and other agencies
- development of effective area co-ordination for delivery of services and management of early leaving, with regional/local youth centres, either as annexes to schools, TAFEs or community facilities, having the responsibility to provide case-management and co-ordinated mentoring, counselling, facilitation and placement services for all early school leavers, and including having responsibility for assisting school leavers to find stable employment and/or courses as appropriate
- an emphasis on generic skills and competency development as well as academic achievement
- acceptance that part-time work may be a plus for some school students, to be encouraged as part of a flexible learning package, rather than regarded as a negative factor impeding their more formal studies
- development of school-based research, with mechanisms to implement tracking of early leavers over time, to inform and improve future practice and policy
- professional development and training for the various stakeholders to ensure successful implementation of these new approaches to policy and practice

When they talk of a 'cracked mosaic' to describe the complexity of this area, McIntyre et al (1999) emphasise the need to co-ordinate our efforts and avoid students slipping through the cracks. These suggestions may help to achieve that objective.

Comments and suggestions regarding this publication are welcome. They should be directed to the address below.
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